

Remarks of Lt. Governor Becky Skillman at the
Madam C.J. Walker Theater Celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
January 18, 2010

How appropriate that we meet here at Madam Walker Theater, as we celebrate the life and dream of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Madam C. J. Walker herself was born into a former slave family, and she overcame adversity to become known as the first African-American woman millionaire. More importantly, throughout her life, she used her power to better the lives of others.

Some Americans and some Hoosiers may think of today as just another federal holiday, a chance to catch up on sleep or take in a movie, a day to be treated as a vacation.

But when Congress voted to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. with a holiday, it was to bring attention to his life and his legacy – not to get everyone out of work for the day. If anything, we should be more active and more engaged in our communities on this day.

That would be the best kind of tribute to a man who lived his life in the public eye, fighting for justice and giving everything he had, including his life, to make our country a better place.

Dr. King's fight for freedom, equality, and dignity for all races changed our country and our state forever.

Dr. King said that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." That could be in the home, in the workplace or in the community. He also said that "We must work unceasingly, to uplift this nation that we love to a higher destiny, to a higher plateau of compassion, to a more noble expression of humanness."

He understood that it's not enough to recognize a threat to justice; we have to pursue justice with diligence and work for it.

Thanks to the diligence and work of Dr. King, we are able to come together and enjoy the gifts of freedom and diversity, serving others and serving each other to keep Dr. King's dream alive.

I hope that, as we celebrate this special day, every Hoosier will be inspired to do something, no matter how small, for those in need. And, as we know, of all God's children, those most in need today are the people of Haiti.

And maybe in this New Year, we will love one another with a renewed passion to be that "drum major" for justice, peace and righteousness, like Dr. King would have us to be.

I talked early about Madam C.J. Walker being a role model, and today there are countless Hoosiers who are living their lives that way.

There are so many examples, but I can't help but think about Tracey and Reggie Jones. They've been blessed in their business, and they do a tremendous job of giving back to their community. The annual McMiracle on 38th Street is a powerful example of their generosity, but it's only one of many ways they've touched and changed countless lives and inspired hope in so many Hoosiers.

If each of us would be our own "drum major" for justice, peace and righteousness, there would be no better way to honor Dr. King and to keep his dream alive.

May God bless you, and God be with the people of Haiti.